

St. James's Church
1991 Massachusetts Avenue,
corner of Beech Street
Cambridge
Middlesex County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-1032

HABS
MASS
9-CAMB
31-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

ST. JAMES'S CHURCH

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MASS
9-CAMB

Location: 1991 Massachusetts Avenue, corner of Beech Street,
Cambridge, Middlesex County, Massachusetts

31

Present Owner
and Occupant: Wardens and Vestry of St. James's Parish

Present Use: Church

Statement of
Significance: St. James's is a well-preserved, interestingly
sited stone church of Richardsonian Romanesque
design with a central crossing tower.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: The land at the corner of Beech Street and Massachusetts Avenue (site of the old Davenport tavern) was purchased by St. James's Parish from Mary Meacham in 1885. Adjoining lots on Beech Street had been acquired by the parish in 1870 and 1881 and were used for erection of the original church and parish house.
2. Date of erection: 1888-89. The original building permit was granted, June 5, 1888. Building Permit 1219.
3. Architect: Henry M. Congdon (1834-1922)
4. Builder: William L. Dodge, mason.
5. Alterations and additions: References are to building permits.

1894 (4879) Addition of the stone belfry was by James Quinn, builder.

1904 A new stone porch was added to the west entrance of the church.

1912 (14584) A one-story wood parish house was built adjoining the church building with William P. Richards as architect and F. T. Morcombe White Co. as the builder.

B. Sources of Information:

1. Secondary and published sources:

Abbott, Edward. "St. James's Episcopal Church," Semi-Centennial Souvenir of Cambridge. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge Chronicle, 1896. pp. 132-3.
History of church and buildings.

Abbott, Edward. St. James's Parish, Cambridge, Forty Years of Parish History, 1864-1904. Cambridge, Mass.: 1909.

- p. 69 Exterior photograph, southerly exposure.
- p. 85 Exterior photograph, westerly exposure.
- p. 109 Interior photograph, nave and chancel.
- p. 135 Exterior photograph, church in winter.
- p. 138 Plan, showing location of memorials.
- p. 140 Plan of buildings in 1906.

Abbott, Edward. St. James's Parish, Centennial Year. Cambridge, Mass.: 1964.

Cambridge Tribune. June 26, 1886.
History of church and parish.

Cambridge Tribune. June 16, 1888.
Description, drawing, and floor plan of new church.

Cambridge Tribune. August 11, 1888.
Drawing and floor plan of new church.

Cambridge Tribune. December 29, 1888.
Work progressing.

Cambridge Tribune. February 2, 1889.
Work progressing.

Cambridge Tribune. July 27, 1889.
Descriptive progress report.

Cambridge Tribune. October 19, 1889.
Work in final stages.

Cambridge Tribune. November 2, 1889.
Complete four-volume description of church, interior and exterior, listing all suppliers of material.

Cambridge Tribune. Souvenir Number: The Harvard Bridge, The University City. Cambridge, Mass.: June, 1890.
Exterior photograph on p. 9.

Gilman, Arthur (ed.) The Cambridge of Eighteen Hundred and Ninety-Six. Cambridge, Mass.: 1896.
Exterior photograph on p. 234.

Rettig, Robert Bell. Guide to Cambridge Architecture: Ten Walking Tours. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1969.

Prepared by Susan E. Maycock
Survey Associate
June 20, 1969

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: St. James's Church is a fine example of the Richardsonian Romanesque manner in which both the masonry and interior woodwork are excellent in design and craftsmanship.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: About 130 feet x 90 feet, one story with a crossing tower, basically basilican shape with shallow transepts and side aisles of unequal width.
2. Foundations: There are large quarry-cut stone above grade; rough stone walls with brick around doorways are found below grade. Cellar has a dirt floor over rock stratum (which prevented excavation deeper than about 4 feet). The church floor is supported on four rows of brick piers running the length of nave. Outer rows measure about 6 feet x 2 feet x 20 inches with stone courses to 3 feet above ground and stone capping courses. Inner rows are more slender and lack stone bases. Cornerstone at southeast corner of south transept reads: "S. James's Church [two damaged lowercase letters - rd? - signifying reared?] AD. 1888."
3. Wall construction: Random-laid rough-hewn irregular blocks of gray-green and yellowish conglomerate is the predominate material; smooth brick was used for window surrounds, porch arches, and the string course. Hard red sandstone was used for steps, buttress caps, gable copings, and decorative trim. The stone is set in black mortar, brick in pink. Careless modern repointing used light gray mortar throughout.

4. Structural system, framing: Masonry bearing walls are pierced by large arches dividing nave from choir and choir from apse. Wooden open arcades on wooden columns support an exposed roof structure.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads etc.: West (front) entrance porch was added in 1904. Two porches are on the south side, one centered on nave, the other on transept. All three porches are stone and have brick semicircular arches and four steps. The nave porch arch is flanked by buttresses terminating in conical stone caps with crocket finials. The gable has an (empty) sculpture niche with round-arched brick surround, corbelled base, and corbelled gablet with a chi rho cross finial. Transept porch gable roof intersects a pent roof spanning the transept width between buttresses. Cellar bulkhead at the junction of north transept and nave, is now covered by a cement block enclosure. Fourth entrance, to the sacristy, is now altered and built into the wing connecting with new additions.
6. Chimneys: One, at west corner of north transept.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The three major entrances have paired oak doors with semicircular panels above; there are four rectangular panels and three elaborate strap hinges per door.
 - b. Windows: Windows are round-arched and set with leaded stained glass without mullions. The west rose and south transept gable rose windows have simple wooden geometric tracery. Crossing tower lantern has five arcaded windows on each face. Six apse windows are flanked by fourteen sandstone columns of Romanesque design arranged in pairs. Capitals are scalloped; each shaft has a molded band at mid-point. Wooden window frames are painted dark red. Transept fenestration is asymmetrical. West transept has three tall windows; south transept has five lower windows under the rose window in the gable.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Gable roof has a double pitch with a break at the line of the side aisles. The north aisle roof has lower pitch than the nave roof; both south slopes have almost equal pitch (reflecting difference in width of north and south aisles).

Masonry wall dividing choir from sanctuary projects above roof, separating choir roof from half cone of apse roof. All roofs are covered with rectangular gray slate and have green copper ridges.

- b. Cornice, eaves: Very simple molded metal cornices contain gutters to which exterior downspouts are fitted.
- c. Dormers, towers: Three dormers, each with paired round-headed windows, are on each side of nave roof. One dormer with a triple round-headed window is on each side of the choir roof. All have truncated gables. West (front) gable wall carries the stone open belfry addition on its south slope. The belfry is higher than the main gable, has two round arches separated by paired colonettes, and terminates in a gable with a crocket finial. (Main gable has a Celtic cross as finial.) Crossing tower has a slated square battered base springing from junctions of the aisle roofs with nave and choir roofs and rises well above the main ridge to support a wooden lantern, which has slender corner colonettes, simple corbelled cornice, and pyramidal roof with slightly flared eaves. Tower finial is a metal cross topped by weather cock.

B. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plans: NOTE: Dimensions given are approximate. Three-bayed nave, 54 feet deep x 36 feet wide, is flanked by north aisle 15 feet wide and south aisle 6 feet wide. Crossing area is 36 feet wide x 27 feet deep. North transept continues 15 feet wide aisle in plan and is expressed as transept only in elevation. South transept projects to width of 15 feet. Both have an east-west dimension of 27 feet. Choir is 36 feet wide and 24 feet deep and is flanked on the north by a 15 feet wide organ chamber and on the south by 15 feet wide baptistery. Apsidal sanctuary is 24 feet wide and 15 feet deep. North transept doors open into robing room now serving as entrance to parish house. East of robing room is sacristy entered both from room and from organ chamber. Choir, organ chamber, and baptistery are separated from nave and transepts by masonry wall pierced by three large arches, the central arch being almost full width of the choir. A similar, somewhat narrower, arch opens from choir into sanctuary. Masonry walls flanking choir are pierced by paired arches.

2. Stairways: Choir is raised three steps above the crossing. Sanctuary is raised one step above choir and altar three steps above sanctuary floor. Cellar stairs from the north bulkhead have a straight run. Cellar stairs within the south porch are steep and narrow, make dog-leg turn with winders, and have turned balusters.
3. Flooring: Hardwood, covered with modern brown plastic material in aisles.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls are plastered with slightly rough finish above 3 foot high beaded, narrow, vertical (apparently tongue-and-groove) wainscot. Choir and sanctuary arches are of molded brick and spring from engaged clustered colonettes of red sandstone backed by shallow brick piers with quoin pattern returns. Paired freestanding colonettes separate paired archways in north and south walls of choir. The exposed wooden structure of roof has a dark finish. All supports are wooden. Nave arcades with pierced spandrels spring directly from capitals of octagonal wooden columns. Arches spanning nave spring from colonettes set on capitals of the columns. Arches spanning aisles run from above-mentioned column capitals to stone corbels set in outer walls. Arches between transepts and crossing spring from hammer-beam trusses. The crossing has a hopper ceiling below the lantern, flat ceiling above lantern. Choir ceiling rafters ascend from wall plates supported by lateral masonry walls. The apse has wooden half dome with exposed rafters. All woodwork is meticulously crafted and appears to be in excellent condition.
5. Doorways and doors: For principal entrances, see above, B, 7a. North transept doors are paired, have twelve panels each, and are hung under lunette panel. Double doors lead from robing room beyond north transept into sacristy.
6. Decorative features and trim: Plaster walls are painted buff color with gold, green, and blue stenciled pattern above dadoes. A narrower stenciled band borders windows, doors, and arches of the wall east of the crossing. The apse wall has the *tersanctus* (the English words separated by crosses) lettered in gold below cornice; conventionalized flowers, alpha and omega, and the sacred monogram (IHS) in gold in upper zone of piers. Piers have verses from first stanza of Cranmer's translation of the *Te Deum* in gold Gothic lettering. North transept doors have four panels inscribed in relief Gothic script: "RML/1817-1886/Give her of the fruit of her hands/ and let her own works praise her in the gates" (in memory of Rebecca Levering Mattis). Walls have numerous memorial plaques. Half of the stained-glass windows are figural. Some are signed; e.g., north aisle

windows, "H. E. Goodhue Co., Cambridge, Mass."; "Reynolds, Francis & Rohnsotck, Boston, 1935"; and "Goodhue, Boston" (c. 1920?). Stone colonettes in the choir area have banded shafts and finely sculptured foliated capitals. Apse has high dado of rectangular and square panels capped by Gothic blind arcade. Choir parapet has Gothic arcaded top. Pew ends have trefoil finials with crosses carved in low relief. Pews are oak and have back rails above small spindle-turned supports. Spandrels of north aisle arches have encircled open trefoils. There is a fine eagle lectern at the epistle side of the crossing in front of the choir parapet.

7. Notable hardware: None noted, except strap hinges of major doors (on exterior faces).
8. Lighting: Two brass standards (with three electrified candles each) at entrance to choir appear to be original and may have been piped for gas. Rest of lighting (except altar candles is from relatively modern electric fixtures.
9. Heating: Hot air (circular floor registers) and steam (radiators). There is one fireplace in southwest corner of the robing room. Fireplace fills angle of room assymetrically so that mantel ends turn forty-five degrees with north end shorter than south end. Brick opening is arched.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. General setting and orientation: Apse faces east. Lot is bordered closely by sidewalks and streets on west (Massachusetts Avenue) and south (Beech Street). North side has ample grounds. East side is occupied by parking lot.
2. Enclosures: North side is bordered by 4 foot high cyclone fence.
3. Outbuildings: Parish house stands to northeast of church and is now enlarges and connected to church by modern additions of no particular distinction.
4. Landscaping: Shrubbery and hedges.

Prepared by Daniel D. Reiff
Survey Associate
November 18, 1967, and
Denys Peter Myers
Principal Architectural
Historian
National Park Service
July 9, 1971

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of a cooperative project between the Cambridge Historical Commission (CHC), Albert B. Wolfe, Chairman, and the Historic American Buildings Survey, National Park Service. The project followed a previous one conducted during the summer of 1964 under the same auspices and was initiated in September 1967 and completed in June 1969. It was under the general direction of Robert Bell Retti^g, Associate Survey Director of the CHC, and James C. Massey, Chief, HABS. Miss Susan Maycock, CHC Survey Associate and graduate student in architectural history at Boston University, was responsible for the historical data; the architectural data were written by Daniel D. Reiff, CHC Survey Associate who was at that time a Harvard University doctoral candidate in the Department of Fine Arts; and the photographs were taken by George M. Cushing, Boston. Certain data were supplied by Dr. Bainbridge Bunting, CHC Survey Director and Professor of Art and Architectural History at the University of New Mexico. The records were edited by Denys Peter Myers, Principal Architectural Historian, HABS.